



Grading **GROWN-UPS**

American adults report on their
real relationships with kids

*Highlights from a Nationwide Study by
Lutheran Brotherhood and Search Institute*

Actions Studied

Grading Grown-Ups asked 1,425 American adults which of the following actions they believe are important, and which actions adults actually do on behalf of kids. At least 70 percent of adults believe the first nine actions

(shaded in blue) are “most important” for adults to do. (Adults could choose more than one item as “most important.”)

ACTIONS	BELIEVE IMPORTANT	DO IT	GAP
Encourage success in school —Encourage kids to take school seriously and do well in school.	90	69	21
Expect parents to set boundaries —Expect parents to enforce clear and consistent rules and boundaries.	84	42	42
Teach shared values —Teach kids the same core values as other adults do, such as equality, honesty, and responsibility.	80	45	35
Teach respect for cultural differences —Teach kids to respect the values and beliefs of different races and cultures, even when those values and beliefs conflict with their own.	77	36	41
Guide decision making —Help kids think through the possible good and bad consequences of their decisions.	76	41	35
Have meaningful conversations —Have conversations with kids that help adults and young people “really get to know one another.”	75	34	41
Give financial guidance —Offer young people guidance on responsibly saving, sharing, and spending money.	75	36	39
Discuss personal values —Openly discuss their own values with kids.	73	37	36
Expect respect for adults* —Expect kids to respect adults and elders as authority figures.	68	67	1
Report positive behavior —Tell parent(s) if they see a child or teenager doing something right.	65	22	43
Ensure well-being of neighborhood kids —Feel responsible to help ensure the well-being of the young people in their neighborhood.	63	35	28
Report misbehavior —Tell parent(s) if they see the child or teenager doing something wrong.	62	33	29
Discuss religious beliefs —Openly discuss their own religious or spiritual beliefs with kids.	60	35	25
Pass down traditions —Actively teach young people to preserve, protect, and pass down the traditions and values of their ethnic and/or religious culture.	56	38	18
Know names —Know the names of many kids in the neighborhood.	50	34	16
Provide service opportunities —Give kids lots of opportunities to make their communities better places.	48	13	35
Seek opinions —Seek kids’ opinions when making decisions that affect them.	48	25	23
Model giving and serving —Volunteer time or donate money to show young people the importance of helping others.	47	16	31
Give advice —Give advice to young people who are not members of the family.	13	17	–4

*This action is included in the top nine because it fell within 70 percent based on the +/- 4 percent margin of error.

Why Grade Grown-Ups?

Both research and common sense tell us that kids need adults in their lives. But what should this involvement look like? How often should it occur? And what do we believe adults should actually do in their relationships with kids outside their own families?

Lutheran Brotherhood and Search Institute decided to explore these questions in a national, first-of-its-kind study we call *Grading Grown-Ups: American Adults Report on Their Real Relationships with Kids*.

Grading Grown-Ups was triggered by research that shows young people need adults in their lives. Yet most youth have few meaningful relationships with adults outside their own families. So we asked American adults—parents and non-parents—to tell us which adult behaviors they believe are most important in contributing to the healthy development of young people.

Then we asked them if adults they know actually act on those beliefs.

We were startled to learn that most American adults—across all demographic groups examined—agree on what kids need from adults. Despite this consensus, however, we also learned that very few adults follow through on their beliefs. As adults, we say we care and we show that we understand some important things that kids need from us. But we fail to act. We know what our relationships with kids should be like, but most of us avoid getting involved.

Grading Grown-Ups was sponsored jointly by Lutheran Brotherhood and Search Institute. It is based on a nationally representative survey of 1,425 American adults conducted by the Gallup Organization, in-depth interviews with a subset of 100 survey participants, and an extensive review of the literature on adult engagement with youth, social norms, and social change.

Shared Beliefs about What Kids Need from Adults

American adults agree about many things when it comes to our relationships with kids. In *Grading Grown-Ups*, we asked adults to rate 19 positive actions adults can take in relating to young people. The vast majority of adults—regardless of their gender, race or ethnicity, age, income, or education level—agreed that many things are “most important” actions for adults to do with kids.

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Adults Acting on Beliefs: Giving Financial Guidance

Money can be a touchy subject at any age. But in today's consumer-driven society, it's especially important for adults to talk with kids about a balanced approach to money—an approach that includes sharing and saving, not just spending.

Nathan Dungan of Minneapolis, Minn., found a way to initiate the conversation with his niece, Kelly, 16, and his nephew, Peter, 13. He gives the kids cash for Christmas—but it's cash with a catch.

Kelly and Peter each get three checks—one they can share with a charity, one can they save, and one they can spend any way they want. Nathan's hope is that the kids will divide their money this way throughout the year.

“It's a good way for Kelly and Peter to get in the habit of being charitable and saving for the future,” says Nathan. “Kids need help forming values about money, especially in today's world where they're constantly bombarded by messages telling them to ‘buy, buy, buy’.”

Kelly thinks her Uncle Nathan's gifts are pretty cool. “It makes me feel good when I can share money to help other people.”

When It Comes to Our Kids, We're Not Walking Our Talk

Despite a broad consensus among American adults about what they should do for kids, few adults actually do these things. The alarming gap between what adults believe kids need and what adults actually do shows that we're not providing kids with the relationships and support necessary to grow up healthy.

In fact, adults' real relationships with kids are much more limited and superficial than the vast majority of Americans think they ought to be. In the table on page 2, note the column that highlights the gap between adults' beliefs and actions.

If *Grading Grown-Ups* were actually giving grades to adults, only about one in 20 American adults would get an A for being actively engaged in young people's lives.

Many more adults might receive a B or C because of their concern. The majority of adults would receive lower—even failing—grades because they simply are not engaged in kids' lives.

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Concerned, Involved Adults Invest in Kids

The gap between belief and action isn't as great for some groups of adults as it is for others. So who is most likely to be both concerned and involved with kids outside their own families? No group of adults is consistently engaged with young people. However, people in the following groups are a bit more likely to be involved with children and youth:

- ✓ Women
- ✓ Adults over age 35
- ✓ People with a high school education or less
- ✓ Married and widowed adults
- ✓ People who volunteer at least monthly
- ✓ Longtime community residents (at least 10 years)
- ✓ People who have regular contact with at least one child or teenager
- ✓ People who often attend community meetings
- ✓ African Americans and Hispanics
- ✓ People who attend religious services weekly
- ✓ People who make less than \$60,000 and, in some cases, less than \$20,000 per year
- ✓ Parents

Adults Acting on Beliefs:

Ensure Well-Being of Neighborhood Kids

"When I was growing up, I saw a lot of kids get lost in the system and end up in jail or on drugs," says Rich Mahler of Staten Island, N.Y. "I was lucky to have the support I did when I was growing up."

Motivated by his parents and adults in his community, Rich decided to reach out to kids in Staten Island. In 1996, he began coaching teenagers in a neighborhood basketball program. One year later, Rich helped create an inner-city basketball league.

The league has given hundreds of 13- to 19-year-old boys from a tough neighborhood a safe, nurturing place to go after school. For Rich and the young men he has coached, the program is about more than just basketball. By building their self-confidence, being a positive role model and guide, and showing them the importance of respect and teamwork, Rich is making a difference in the lives of Staten Island youth.

Within Consensus, Some Differences Exist

Although there is widespread consensus among American adults on the nine most important things to do for kids, differences did emerge between sub-groups on all 19 actions. The charts on this page illustrate some of the actions where differences did emerge. (For full information, see the complete report.)

The majority of women and men believe that most of the actions addressed in the study are very important. However, women are more likely than men to believe in the importance of their involvement with kids. (Women are also more likely to act on their beliefs.)

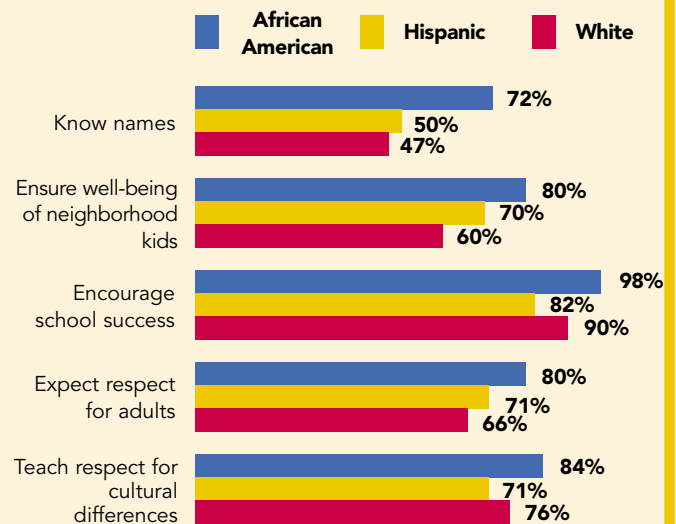
African American and Hispanic adults are more likely than whites to believe these actions are important, but are no more likely to be involved with kids outside their own families.

People who attend religious services at least weekly are more likely than those who never attend to believe these actions are important. Compared to those who never attend, adults who attend religious services as little as once per month are more likely to act on these beliefs.

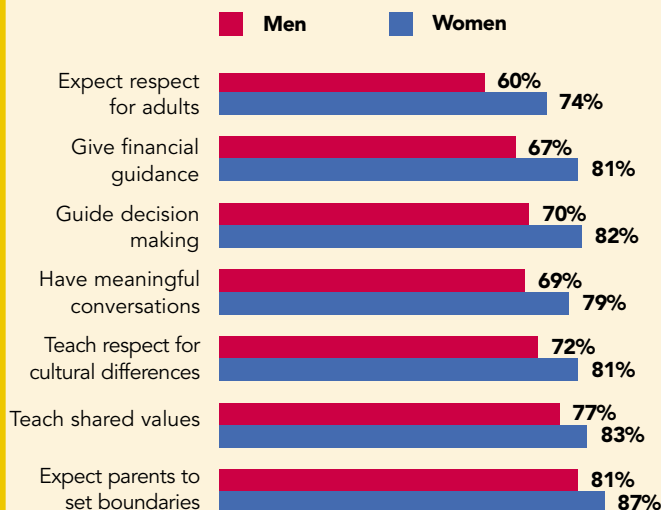
Neither education nor household income made a substantial difference in whether adults thought these actions were important. When differences did appear

on specific actions, people with fewer years of formal education (no formal education past high school) and people who are less affluent (under \$60,000 annual income) tended to consider the actions more highly important.

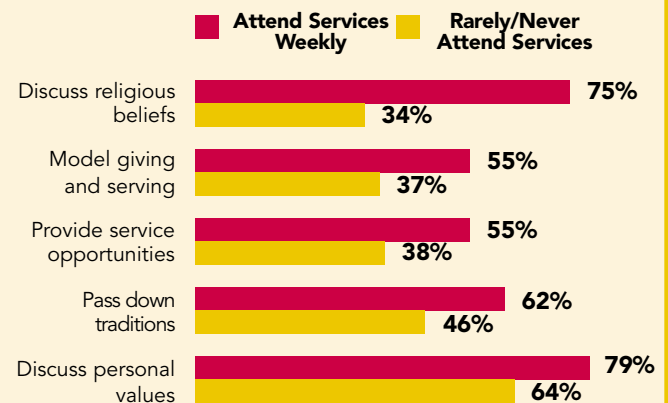
Proportion of Adults Designating Action as "Most Important," by Race/Ethnicity



Proportion of Men and Women Designating Action as "Most Important"



Proportion of Adults Designating Action as "Most Important," by Religious Involvement



Everyone Can Take Action

Grading Grown-Ups describes a different kind of investment that our society needs to make, one in relationships with our kids. This investment is not driven by money, policy, and top-down change. It is about human energy and the will to make a difference for our young. Research shows that having positive relationships with adults is essential for kids to develop skills and values, and become confident, independent, and successful.

Bridging the gap between adults' beliefs and actions about kids is a critical challenge for every American community. Here are ideas to help communities begin giving kids what they need from adults:

Adults Acting on Beliefs:

Encourage Success in School

The Dragon's Breath Café is breathing new life into the fun of reading. On the second Wednesday evening of every month, third-grade teacher Janet Muller, her 25 students at Duniway Elementary School in Portland, Oregon, and their parents sit down with steaming cups of hot chocolate, warm cookies, and a children's book to read and discuss together. Janet's motivation in inventing the café is to create a positive environment for students who have difficulties in reading and comprehension.

"I became increasingly frustrated with the way too many schools were handling the situation," she states. "They take these little kids out, isolate them from the other students, and put them in lower reading groups. I thought it would be great for them if they could be like everyone else and be reading the same book."

The café also brings families closer together, says Janet, who believes this type of positive interaction gives youth a sense of accomplishment and support. "There is a clear definition between a successful student and an unsuccessful one," she says. "That's an adult who cares." And the kids who visit the Dragon's Breath Café will know that their teacher and their parents care.

Action Ideas for Adults

- ✓ Be bold and introduce yourself to the young people who live around you. Then write down their names to help yourself remember.
- ✓ Find out about the interests of the kids in your extended family, neighborhood, and social network. Find opportunities to connect with them around those things. For example, clip and send them newspaper or magazine articles about their favorite sport or music group.
- ✓ Send cards or e-mail greetings to young people you know to mark holidays, birthdays, and other important milestones in their lives.
- ✓ Tell parents when you see their child doing something responsible or generous. Try to find opportunities to do this more often than you report misbehavior.

Action Ideas for Parents and Guardians

- ✓ Discuss the research results with your child or children. Do they feel like they have enough quality relationships with adults?
- ✓ Consider how you interact with your child's friends. Are you doing what you can to meaningfully participate in their lives?
- ✓ Thank the adults who take an active interest in your child. Invite adults you respect to be part of your child's life.
- ✓ American kids are bombarded by marketing messages to spend money. Help them achieve balance in their lives by inviting them to talk about financial pressures and ways to share, save, and spend money.
- ✓ Encourage your child to seek advice from other adults about important issues such as jobs, education, and living out one's faith in daily life.
- ✓ Get to know your neighbors. Ask neighborhood youth to help plan events, like block parties, that connect all generations.
- ✓ Keep your child safe by asking about her or his adult friends. Be sure you are comfortable with their values, how they treat your child, and how they spend time together.

Action Ideas for Schools, Congregations, and Other Organizations

- ✓ Use all available opportunities to communicate to the adults you touch (as members or constituents) about the ways they can be involved with kids—ways they probably already believe are important.
- ✓ Offer simple, fun, one-time opportunities for adults and young people to get to know each other. Sponsor social events, service projects, or educational experiences that include people from all generations in planning and participating in the activities.
- ✓ Examine your organization's activities—including classroom and social events—to determine if they help build relationships across generations.
- ✓ Teach young people to share their money with charities by recruiting adults to match kids' contributions.
- ✓ Link young people with adults who have pertinent insights and skills, such as skills with money management, insights into dating relationships, and experience with career choices.
- ✓ Urge adults to form meaningful relationships with young people in all areas of their lives, including neighborhood, workplace, and social activities.
- ✓ In congregations, encourage adults of all ages to share their faith journeys, beliefs, and values with young people. Invite young people to share their stories, too.

Action Ideas for Young People

- ✓ Send a thank-you letter or e-mail to adults who have been important sources of guidance and support for you.
- ✓ Strengthen your skills at communicating with adults. Learn to ask questions about their lives, too.
- ✓ Seek advice from one or two adults you trust when you're facing an important decision or challenge.
- ✓ Ask adults how they make decisions about sharing, saving, and spending money. Do they face peer pressure to spend money and "keep up with the Joneses"? Which charitable programs are most important to them?
- ✓ Speak up when adults don't listen to young people or when they use negative stereotypes of children and adolescents. Offer an alternate perspective.
- ✓ Turn service projects and other activities into an opportunity to connect with adults by inviting them to participate with you.

Adults Acting on Beliefs: Know Names

Mary Yagel recently retired from her job as a school-bus driver outside Rochester, N.Y. But for more than 31 years, she meant a lot more to her young passengers than just a ride to school. Every day, Mary found ways to tell kids they were important.

She learned the names of all the kids who rode her bus and greeted them on sight. Mary talked to teachers to find out what lessons the kids were learning. "If they were learning the alphabet and had to wear a hat for the letter 'H', I'd wear a hat," recalls Mary. "I'd say to them, 'I have my hat on. Do you?'"

Mary noticed that many working parents were unable to see their kids off on the first day of school, so she decided to start taking snapshots. She made personal cards from each photo and gave them to parents so that they could be a part of their child's first day of school.

Mary made sure she went to school functions and sports events. "For some kids, there was nobody there for them. But they knew me and they saw I was there for them."

A Decade-Long Partnership for Asset Building

This study grows out of a decade-long partnership between Lutheran Brotherhood and Search Institute that promotes the healthy development of children and youth. Over the years, thousands of Lutheran Brotherhood members and volunteers have joined with

communities nationwide to build assets for children and youth. Through their ongoing partnership, Lutheran Brotherhood and Search Institute help offer communities the knowledge, tools, and resources they need to ensure that all kids have what they need to succeed.

About Lutheran Brotherhood

Lutheran Brotherhood is a faith-based, member-owned financial services organization that helps its members link their faith, values, and finances. In addition to providing quality products and services, Lutheran Brotherhood serves the community as a resource for financial education, charitable outreach, and volunteer service.

About Search Institute

Search Institute is an independent, not-for-profit, nonsectarian organization whose mission is to advance the well-being of adolescents and children by generating knowledge and promoting its application. To accomplish this mission, the institute generates, synthesizes, and communicates new knowledge, convenes organizational and community leaders, and works with state and national organizations.



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